

**U. S. DEPARTMENT  
OF COMMERCE**

FIRST MAPS OF WASHINGTON, D.C.

**COAST AND GEODETIC  
SURVEY**

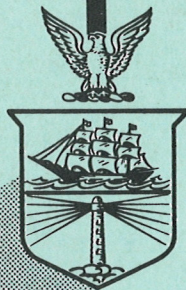
L'ENFANT PLAN

ELLICOTT ENGRAVING

DERMOTT or TIN CASE MAP

KING PLATS

**Washington 25, D.C.**





# U. S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

## COAST AND GEODETIC SURVEY

### WASHINGTON, D. C.

#### FIRST MAPS OF WASHINGTON, D. C.

**T**HE first official city maps of the District of Columbia deserve special attention because of their historical record of the early planning of the Nation's capital city. Also of interest are the struggles and conflicts of the individuals responsible for developing a comprehensive plan from which has resulted one of the world's most beautiful cities.

The first four of the early city maps are:

(1) "Plan of the City intended for the Permanent Seat of the Government of the United States — Projected agreeable to the direction of the President of the United States in pursuance of an Act of Congress passed the sixteenth day of July 1790, establishing the Permanent Seat on the bank of the Potowmac," executed by Peter Charles L'Enfant in 1791. (See frontispiece.)

(2) "Plan of the City of Washington in the Territory of Columbia, ceded by the States of Virginia and Maryland to the United States of America, and by them established as the Seat of their Government after the year 1800," executed by Andrew Ellicott and engraved in Philadelphia in 1792.

(3) "The Dermott or Tin Case Map of the City of Washington 1797-8," prepared by James R. Dermott in 1797.

(4) "The King Plats of the City of Washington in the District of Columbia, 1803," produced by Nicholas King.

By Act of Congress of July 16, 1790, provision was made for the selection of a site for the Federal City of the United States. Later the next year, when the selection was made and planning had been initiated, the term Federal City was officially changed to "The City of Washington in the Territory of Columbia." This name first appears on the Ellicott map of 1792.

Three commissioners were appointed on January 22, 1791, by President Washington, to take charge of the newly created territory, to supervise its survey, and to attend to the business growing out of its condemnation for public use. More than a month previous to the Commissioners taking up their work, President Washington appointed Andrew Ellicott to survey the bounds of the territory and the French engineer, Peter Charles L'Enfant was appointed to prepare the plan of the city. The plan of Washington as designed by L'Enfant was originally referred to as "a mode of taking possession of and improving the whole district to leave to posterity a grand idea of patriotic interest which promoted it."

Preceding and during the surveys by Ellicott of the boundaries of the District of Columbia, L'Enfant was engaged in planning the future city. On the tract

where the city was to arise and also adjacent to it, there existed one real and two proposed towns. Georgetown was an established community that had been in existence some 35 or 40 years and Carrollsburg and Hamburg were proposed towns.

The manuscript plan of the City of Washington, executed by L'Enfant, in 1791, was for years in the custody of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds of the War Department. It was mounted on cloth and for preservation was coated with varnish which had rendered it quite opaque. In 1887, the original plan, dilapidated from handling and faded by age, was entrusted to the Coast and Geodetic Survey for restoration and reproduction. The faded condition of the manuscript required that work of restoration, comparison and verification be done under special conditions of solar light reflected by mirrors and with the aid of magnifying glasses and colored screens. In places the surface was defaced by cracks. An exact tracing of the manuscript as it existed at the time it was received was carefully prepared. In the tracing no features were reproduced which were not distinguishable on the original and this accounts for breaks in some of the lines appearing on the present printed copies.

The original drawing was in colors including blue, green, yellow, light red, and dark red tints used to symbolize various features. The water areas tinted blue on the original L'Enfant map had faded, but the extent of the areas remained apparent. Fifteen areas, originally shown in yellow, were proposed for division among the several States in the Union; the center of each square was intended for a suitable memorial such as the State may choose to erect to perpetuate the memory of individuals "whose achievements rendered them worthy of being invited to the attention of the youth of succeeding generations." The yellow tint had faded from the original but the areas were restored from marginal notes.

Three dull but well-defined figures were interpreted to represent areas described in the marginal notes as being set aside for use of religious denominations in erecting places of worship. These areas were colored light red to conform with the manuscript notation.

The faded green-tinted areas on the map identified "the well-improved fields" referred to in the marginal notes as green plots. These areas included lands set aside for parks and covered mainly the area now known as the Mall, adjacent areas in southwest Washington, the White House grounds, and other park areas. A dark red tint was believed to identify the buildings existing at the time on either side of the Mall.



# PLAN

of the CITY, intended for the  
Permanent SEAT of the  
Government of the UNITED STATES.  
Projected agreeable to the direction  
of the PRESIDENT of the UNITED STATES  
in pursuance of an ACT of CONGRESS passed the  
sixteenth day of July, MDCCXC, &  
"establishing the Permanent Seat  
on the bank of the Potomac."

By Peter Charles L'Enfant

GUIDE TO COLORS  
(on original manuscript)



Green



Dark Red



Yellow



Light Red

The water of this Creek is intended  
to be conveyed on the high ground, where  
the Congress house stands, and after  
watering that part of the City, its surplus  
will fall from under the base of that  
Edifice, and in a cascade of 20 feet in  
height, and 50 in breadth into the  
reservoir below; thence to run  
in three falls through the  
Garden into the  
Grand Canal.

The perpendicular height  
of the ground where the Congress  
house stands, is above the tide of  
Tiber Creek, 78 feet.





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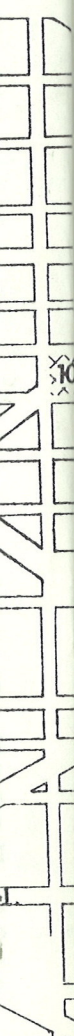
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engraved map of the city of Washington was prepared.

The only major difference between the plan of the City of Washington as it exists today, and the original plan as designed by L'Enfant and carried through by Ellicott, lies in the southwestern portion. This departure from the plan was the elimination of Tiber Creek, and the creating of Potomac Park and the tidal basin area by reclaimed land from the Potomac River.

Two engraver's copies of the original manuscript were prepared by Ellicott; the first was sent to Boston for engraving and the second was assigned to an engraving firm in Philadelphia. Proofs from the Boston plate were received in Philadelphia in July 1792, and revealed that this plate did not show depths in the Potomac River and the Eastern Branch. At the request of Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson, data were immediately assembled and soundings were added to the Philadelphia engraving. This plate came into general use in the new city and was regarded as the authoritative scheme of the city.

The original copperplate, as engraved by Thackara and Vallance of Philadelphia in 1792, is now in the possession of the Coast and Geodetic Survey. Good impressions can still be pulled from this plate.

#### THE DERMOTT MAP

After Ellicott left the city in 1793, James R. Dermott was placed in charge of dividing the squares into lots. Prior to entering the service of the city, Dermott was an instructor at the Alexandria Academy. He was the author of the third map of the city, known as the Tin Case Map, which was sent to Congress in 1798 by President Adams.

Dermott was directed in 1795 by the Commissioners to prepare a plat of the city with every public appropriation plainly and distinctly delineated. Squares were sub-divided into lots in accordance with certificates of survey obtained from the office of the Commissioners. The map was intended as a part of an executive order by President Washington directing the trustees of the City of Washington to convey to the Commissioners the streets of the city and the grounds which were appropriated to public use. But in the press of business at the close of President Washington's administration the plan was not annexed to the document. To correct this omission, it became necessary in 1798 for President Adams to execute a second document of conveyance. Thus the map defining public lands of the new city as prescribed by George Washington was officially put in force by President Adams.

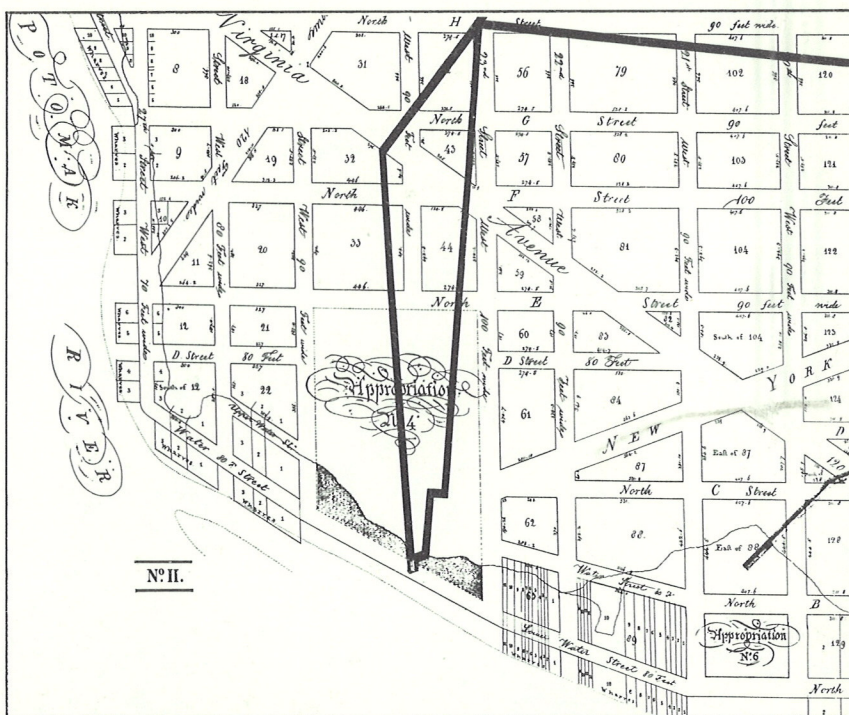
#### KING PLATS

The King Plats, completed in 1803 by Nicholas King, comprised the fourth in chronological order of the series of cartographic representations of the City of Washington. Sixteen plats, on the scale of 200 feet

to the inch, are included in the series. The sheets represent an elaborate piece of map-making and they were evidently prepared with great care. In addition to streets, squares, et cetera, there are indicated by red lines the holdings of the original owners of the lands within the limits of the city.

Nicholas King entered the employ of the Commissioners as a surveyor in 1796. He resigned in 1797 but re-entered on duty in 1802 as chief city surveyor. After completing the plats in 1803, Mr. King remained as the surveyor of the city until his death in 1812.

In reproducing the King Plats, careful attention was given to duplicating the sheets as nearly like the originals as possible. Nothing was touched up and no features were omitted. Blanks occurring from breaks in lines on the original drawings were left blank on



Reduced Section of Sheet II of the King Plats of the City of Washington, Produced in 1803

the restored copy. Many errors were found in the sheets but these were reproduced just as they were found in the original plats. For instance, east was found where west should be but it was so copied; the aim being to furnish an exact duplicate of the manuscript as it appeared at the time it was copied. A careful record was kept of errors and omissions and these were noted on a sheet accompanying the plats, together with pertinent notes concerning their history.

The King Plats and Dermott Map, in addition to the L'Enfant plan and Ellicott map, were required as evidence for use in court, to establish title by the Government to the flats along the Potomac River in the southwest area of the city. Like the first two manuscripts, both had deteriorated and soon would have been beyond duplication. Accordingly, the Coast and Geodetic Survey was also assigned responsibility of restoring and reproducing duplicates of these maps which were published in an atlas measuring about 28 by 41 inches. Several sets of these maps bound in Atlas form remain in custody of the Coast and Geodetic Survey.